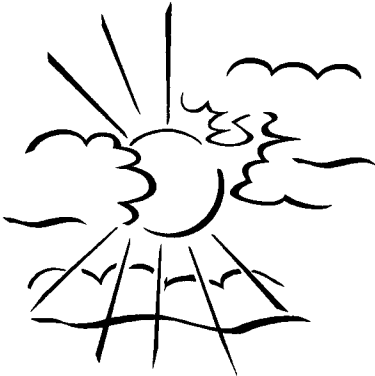


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Wednesday, May 10, 2006

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DHS Officials Not Pushing Panic Button

MIRS, Tuesday, May 9, 2006

The acting head of the state's welfare system said today Michigan would not be forced to swallow \$100 million in federal fines if it doesn't have roughly 25,000 of those receiving public assistance involved in some type of work program by October.

Don **MUSSEN**, the acting director of the Department of Human Services' (DHS) family support services, told *MIRS* that new federal requirements require that half of the roughly 50,000 qualifying welfare recipients need to be working in some form by October and it's expected that DHS won't be able to hit that number.

But DHS' new Jobs, Education and Training (JET) program will be off the ground and in full flight by the time the federal government gets around to checking in on Michigan's 2006 welfare compliance levels, he said (See "[DHS Announces Welfare Expansion](#)," 5/3/06). The federal government recently sent DHS a letter commending the department for having more than 50 percent of its welfare recipients involved in work for 2004, he said.

By Mussen's calculations, the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services won't get around to sending a letter on Michigan's 2006 numbers until early 2009. By then, the JET program will have taken hold and Michigan will be showing enough progress to spare it any fines.

"There is a belief out there that the federal government is out to remove public assistance money from the states. That's not the case," said Mussen, adding that the federal government is more interested in seeing progress and Michigan will have a year and a half of data to show the DHS is doing that. "We are not going to be subject to the penalty because we will succeed."

On Oct. 1 the federal government will change the base year it asks states to use for the federal requirement that 50 percent of welfare recipients be working to some extent. Currently, the base year is 1995, when more than 220,000 were collecting welfare. Since so many people have been moved off welfare in the last 10 years, DHS has no problem meeting the work requirements.

In more than four months, the base year will 2005, when Michigan had 78,000 on welfare.

Mussen's comments come after the House Appropriations Committee moved to the floor a supplemental budget bill ([HB 4309](#)) that uses the federal Oct. 1 changes as a reason to act quickly on reforms House Republicans have been pushing for more than a year.

Rep. Jerry **KOOIMAN** (R-Grand Rapids) is riding herd on a plan to limit lifetime benefits to able-bodied welfare recipients to 48 months. Only 24 months of benefits can be given out during a single stretch. The theory is that time limits and steeper financial penalties will be the stick necessary to encourage healthy adults to find a job.

The House bill takes away checks from welfare recipients who aren't following the new work rules for 90 days. After the third time of not complying, the recipient would see their benefits go away for a year. A fourth time means a lifetime ban from receiving public assistance.

Currently welfare recipients receive \$200 if they are working but not making enough to

themselves from welfare. But the House Republican plan takes away that \$200 if that person isn't following the federal work requirements.

"We want to help able-bodied adults transition from dependence to self-sufficiency," said Kooiman. "With this funding in place vulnerable members of our society who have mental or physical disabilities will continue to receive welfare, but those with no barriers to employment will be compelled to find work with the assistance of our new education and job training programs."

The bill moved out of committee on party lines with Democrats not supporting the bill while Republicans did.

Kooiman and Republicans also are interested in moving quickly on the reforms so it can cash in on \$12.9 million in estimated savings. Mussen said the estimated savings are wishful thinking on Republicans' part. While Mussen wouldn't put a price tag on the Republicans' plan, he said there's no way these changes will net the state \$12.9 million in savings in Fiscal Year (FY) 2006.

The Michigan League of Human Services (MLHS) weighed in on the issue today, too. MLHS Executive Director Sharon **PARKS** said more than 39,000 children and 13,000 adults would be impacted by a 48-month time limit. As it is, Michigan only gives a family of three \$489 per month for welfare, which is 61 percent below the federal poverty level and only \$5,868 per year for a mother with two children.

That grant is not enough to cover the average cost of a two-bedroom dwelling in southeast Michigan. It's not until a family of three brings in \$811 a month before they no longer qualify for welfare payments.

Parks reiterated arguments that Michigan is at risk of losing a substantial pot of money barring the House Republicans' plan is basically rhetoric. She said Michigan and other states have years before they are told they didn't comply.

"Responsible policymakers simply do not choose the worst of times to shred the safety net," Parks said.

Michigan Report

May 9, 2006

G.O.P. WELFARE REFORMS MOVE FORWARD

Lifetime limits on cash assistance and added staff to help with assessment of individuals seeking welfare moved forward on Tuesday as the House Appropriations Committee sent a supplemental budget bill to the full chamber addressing the proposed reforms.

Republicans and Democrats continued to clash over pushing the reforms through, with Rep. Jerry Kooiman (R-Grand Rapids) saying implementation of the governor's Jobs, Education and Training program has not been actively pursued and Rep. Chris Kolb (D-Ann Arbor) saying the administration is putting the plan into action and that because lawmakers have not reached a consensus, the bill (HB 4309) should not move forward at this time.

Mr. Kooiman said had the reforms been put into place last year when House Republicans first pushed the proposal through the budget, or again in December, the state would be closer to meeting federal work requirements.

But Rep. Carl Williams (D-Saginaw) said that while he hears the urgency of meeting federal requirements, the drive of reforms should be focused on improving the quality of life of people dependent on welfare. And Rep. Morris Hood (D-Detroit) said the Republican plan amounted to counting on savings from getting people off the rolls to provide expanded services to those leftover. "That doesn't pass the smell test to me," he said.

The bill was amended to require bi-annual reports be made to the legislative committees overseeing the Department of Human Services and the Department of Labor and Economic Growth to track the number of participants employed, those who are receiving training and education and how many are meeting federal work requirements.

Sept. 25 trial date set for Hollands

Separate juries to hear case; logistics to be worked out

By Kevin Grasha
Lansing State Journal

Tim and Lisa Holland, charged in the death of their 7-year-old son, Ricky, are tentatively scheduled to stand trial Sept. 25, attorneys said Tuesday.

The case will go before Ingham County Circuit Judge Paula Manderfield.

Two separate juries will hear the case, said Lisa Holland's co-counsel Mike Nichols, although it has not been determined how that will work - if both sets of jurors will hear evidence at the same time or whether the trials will be conducted separately.

Attorneys in the case are expected in court May 30 to argue several motions.

The best way to assure a fair process is to try the cases at the same time, Ingham County Prosecutor Stuart Dunning III said.

"Most of the evidence against one is evidence against the other," he said.

Tim Holland, 37, and his wife, Lisa, 33, face charges of open murder, child abuse, obstruction of justice and filing a false police report. They have accused each other of killing Ricky.

During the Hollands' 14-day preliminary hearing that spanned three months, it was revealed that Tim Holland told his mother that Lisa violently pulled Ricky out of his room and "just went nuts" after Tim suggested he wanted Ricky to stay at his mother's house for a few weeks. He said Lisa hit the boy with a hammer.

In a Jan. 26 police interview, Lisa Holland said her husband's moods could swing like a pendulum and that he may have strangled or suffocated Ricky, who was reported missing July 2. Ricky's body was found nearly seven months later.

Contact Kevin Grasha at 267-1347 or kgrasha@lsj.com.

Trial Date Set For Parents In Death Of Adopted Son

Ricky Holland Reported Missing Last Summer

POSTED: 9:51 am EDT May 10, 2006

MASON, Mich. -- A tentative trial date of Sept. 25 was set for a Williamston couple accused of killing their adopted son, attorneys said.

Separate juries will hear the case against Tim and Lisa Holland, who are charged in the death of 7-year-old Ricky Holland (pictured), said Mike Nichols, one of Lisa Holland's attorneys.

Ingham County Circuit Judge Paula Manderfield will handle the case, although it has not been determined whether the two juries will hear evidence at the same time or separate trials will be held.

Trying the cases at the same time would be the best way to ensure fairness, Ingham County Prosecutor Stuart Dunnings III said. "Most of the evidence against one is evidence against the other," he told the *Lansing State Journal* for a Wednesday story. Tim Holland, 37, and Lisa Holland, 34, were ordered April 11 to stand trial on charges of open murder, first-degree child abuse, obstruction of justice and filing a false police report.

Ricky Holland was reported missing July 2, 2005. In late January of this year, Tim Holland led authorities to Ricky's body in a wooded area near Dansville in rural Ingham County. At the time of his disappearance, Ricky's parents told police they believed he had run away.

District Judge Rosemarie Aquilina decided there was probable cause to send both Hollands to trial on all five charges. But she ruled that Tim Holland was only an accessory after the fact in the open murder count or aided and abetted Lisa Holland.

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Michigan Report

May 9, 2006

HOUSE PASSES CHILD ABUSE LEGISLATION

Repeat sex offenders would be subject to a life sentence without parole if they victimize children under a package of legislation passed by the House on Tuesday.

The bills are SB 709, SB 717, SB 718 and SB 1122 and were approved almost unanimously.

Also approved was HB 6021 on an 87-19 vote, which allows the city of Grand Rapids to levy property taxes for up to 25 years, which in turn would allow the transit authority to leverage \$14 million in federal funding. The legislation is part of a transportation agreement reached by the governor and Republican leadership in the Legislature.

The chamber also passed HB 5917 by 100-5 votes, which would add a 29 cents-per-month fee to prepaid cell phone users to cover 911 services.

Also approved were SB 872 and SB 875, which require local governments to hold budget hearings no less than 30 days before the budget is to be adopted and allow those entities to pool their funds for investment purposes. Those bills were passed unanimously.

Jury trial opens in case of sexual assault of two boys

LAPEER CITY

THE FLINT JOURNAL FIRST EDITION

Wednesday, May 10, 2006

By James L. Smith

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LAPEER - A jury trial for a registered sex offender in the sexual assault of two boys is under way before Lapeer Circuit Judge Michael P. Higgins.

William Gates, 40, of Lapeer was arrested in October on charges of first- and second-degree criminal sexual conduct and criminal sexual assault with intent to penetrate. The incidents allegedly occurred between 2001 and 2003.

Jurors on Tuesday heard testimony from one of the victims and a victim's mother.

Gates has remained in the Lapeer County Jail in lieu of \$1 million bond. In 2000, Gates was convicted of a misdemeanor charge of accosting young children.

Man draws prison time for sexual assaults

by ERICA KOLASKI

Tribune Staff Writer

CHEBOYGAN - A 39-year-old local man was sentenced to serve at least eight years in prison after he was charged with several counts of criminal sexual conduct.

Russel Alan Barrette will serve eight to 15 years in prison on two counts of second-degree criminal sexual conduct and two to four years for two counts of accosting a minor for immoral purposes. The sentences are set to run concurrently.

Barrette was initially charged in connection with one count of first-degree criminal sexual conduct and six counts of second-degree criminal sexual conduct. Court records indicated that the crimes were committed on children under the age of 13 from September 2001 until February 2005.

Barrette's attorney, Christopher Maddaloni, said that he would make no excuses for his client's behavior, but asked for his sentence to be lower because Barrette acknowledged that his behavior was wrong.

Cheboygan County Prosecutor Mickey Castagne said that Barrette targeted young girls during a period of time.

"He targeted girls 11, 12, 13 years of age and taught them to become his sexual partners," she said.

One of the victims' mother spoke in court, saying that people who commit these types of crimes are incurable.

"He ruined my daughter's life," she said.

The victim said that she felt "robbed" of her childhood.

Circuit Court Judge Scott Pavlich said that Barrette's crimes were "very inappropriate and selfish."

Pavlich said that the damage done by Barrette was hard to quantify. His sentence was based on a recommendation from the Michigan Department of Corrections.

Teen's tale guides kid porn arrest

Detroit tied to online plague

May 10, 2006

BY DAWSON BELL
FREE PRESS STAFF WRITER

A 24-year-old Detroit man was arrested Tuesday on child pornography charges in an investigation that stemmed from congressional testimony about the world of child sexual exploitation on the Internet.

Attorney General Mike Cox announced the arrest of Edward Mitchell Mulak on 11 felony charges of possession of child pornography and using a computer to possess child porn.

"Preying on Michigan's children is a heinous crime," Cox said in a statement released Tuesday afternoon.

Nate Bailey, spokesman for the Attorney General's Office, said investigators uncovered Mulak's activity while following leads generated by testimony from Justin Berry, a California teenager lured into the Internet sex trade. Berry was the subject of a New York Times profile in December and testified last month to Congress about child predation online.

Bailey said none of the images allegedly found in Mulak's possession were of Berry. But Mulak was identified as an associate of one of the predators who targeted Berry, Bailey said.

Berry, now 19, described how he hoped initially to find friends his own age by posting his photograph on a Web camera exchange site when he was 13. He said that almost immediately he was set upon by older men who began to make requests -- and offer to pay for -- specific acts.

Over a period of several years, Berry said he developed multiple sex sites, was molested by adults he met online, including at least one from Michigan, and dropped out of school.

Contact **DAWSON BELL** at 313-222-6604 or dbell@freepress.com.

Lawmakers get tougher on sex offenders who target children

May 9, 2006

LANSING, Mich. (AP) — Legislation designed to get tougher on sex offenders who target children is expected to soon be headed to Gov. Jennifer Granholm's desk.

The state House passed versions of the legislation Tuesday. The four bills, with minor differences, already have passed the state Senate and now go back to that chamber for final approval.

Repeat sex offenders would spend life in prison with no possibility of parole under some circumstances, an effort to keep dangerous predators off the streets. The measure would apply to those 17 or older convicted of certain sex crimes against victims under the age of 13.

Other bills in the Legislature, approved by a Senate committee on Tuesday, call for a minimum 25-year prison sentence for first-time offenders.

Once offenders are released from prison, they would be required to be electronically tracked with the use of global positioning system technology. The GPS monitoring would continue for life if they had been convicted of first- or second-degree criminal sexual conduct.

Before the House voted on the bills, lawmakers introduced Mark Lunsford — the father of a 9-year-old Florida girl whose rape and murder last year has prompted action toward similar legislation in several states.

Lunsford — who travels the nation telling the story of his daughter Jessica's abduction and murder — also visited Michigan in March to lobby for tougher laws.

"Each time I come to a state to testify it feels like the first time," Lunsford said in a statement.

Four bills in the package passed the House on Tuesday. All passed by overwhelming votes, with two representatives — Detroit Democrats George Cushingberry and LaMar Lemmons III — not voting.

One of the bills passed unanimously. None of the bills received more than two 'no' votes in the House, which now has 107 members.

Steve Tobocman, D-Detroit, voted against two of the four bills. Marsha Cheeks, D-Detroit, and Leon Drolet, a Republican from Macomb County's Clinton Township, each voted against one of the four bills.

The sex offender bills are Senate Bills 709, 717-18 and 1122. Related bills are House Bills 5421-22 and 5531-33.

On the Net:

Michigan Legislature: <http://www.legislature.mi.gov>

Published May 10, 2006

Bill might cut small-business health insurance costs

By Faith Bremner and Larry Wheeler
State Journal correspondents

WASHINGTON - Michigan's small-business owners say they could make health insurance more affordable and available to their employees under legislation now being debated on the Senate floor. The bill, called the Health Insurance Marketplace Modernization and Affordability Act, would give small businesses greater bargaining power with insurance companies by allowing them to band together in health care associations that cross state lines to offer affordable insurance to workers. It would also give them relief from costly state mandates.

Critics, however, say the legislation would drive up premiums and eliminate hard-won health care coverage guarantees such as for hospice care, diabetes drugs and prevention programs.

"The legislation will help level the playing field in the market," said Doug Hilbert, co-owner of the computer consulting firm PTD Technology in East Lansing. "Now we have only a few (insurance) providers at the top."

For the past three years, Hilbert has watched insurance premiums for his 26 employees increase by between 16 percent and 20 percent. Doctor office co-pays for Hilbert's employees used to be \$5 three years ago, now they're \$30, he said.

According to a Henry J. Kaiser Family Foundation survey of U.S. businesses last year, 59 percent of employers with 199 or fewer workers provided health insurance benefits to their workers in 2005, down from 68 percent in 2002. In comparison, 98 percent of all large firms with 200 or more workers provided employee health insurance in 2005, down from 100 percent in 2002.

In surveys going back to 1986, health care costs have been the No. 1 issue for the 15,000 members of the Michigan Chapter of the National Federation of Independent Business, the group's spokesman Keith Carey said.

The bill before the Senate is notable because it's the first time such legislation aimed at small businesses has actually made it to the floor for debate. In July, the House, as it has done many times in the past, approved a small-business health association bill. Republican Reps. Mike Rogers, Joe Schwarz and Candice Miller voted for it.

Sen. Carl Levin, a Democrat, has not yet taken a position on the bill, while Sen. Debbie Stabenow, also a Democrat, favors an amended version sponsored by Sens. Richard Durbin, D-Ill., and Blanche Lincoln, D-Ark.

Michigan's Insurance Commissioner Linda Watters opposes the legislation because it would supercede state law that prohibits small-business health plans from marketing their product to companies with healthier workers and not to companies with workers with pre-existing conditions, she said.

"This practice is commonly known as cherry-picking," Watters wrote in a letter to Stabenow.

"If cherry-picking is allowed, the pool of individuals left in the 'regular marketplace' will suffer large rate increases."

The legislation also would allow small-business health plans to disregard state benefit requirements, Watters said. The plans could stop paying for things like hospice care, diabetic drugs, newborn coverage, visits to pediatricians, obstetricians and gynecologists and chemotherapy if the legislation passes, she said.

The chief author of the Senate bill, Sen. Michael Enzi, R-Wyo., rejects the notion that small-business health insurance associations would hurt people with chronic diseases.

"We're trying to bring the cost down," he said. "Businesses won't necessarily eliminate all those mandates.

Michigan Report

May 9, 2006

STABENOW SAYS GOV'T FAILURES **MANDATE EXTENSION OF MEDICARE**

With a deadline of next Monday looming for Medicare recipients to sign up for a pharmaceutical plan under Part D, U.S. Sen. Debbie Stabenow (D-Lansing) said the inability of the government to issue correct information about the program to worried senior citizens is reason enough to extend the signing deadline to December 31.

Ms. Stabenow spoke to reporters Tuesday on her effort to win passage of either legislation she has sponsored extending the deadline to December 31, or to an amendment to other legislation extending the deadline.

She spoke one day before U.S. Health and Human Services Secretary Mike Leavitt is to appear in the Lansing area to encourage individuals to sign up for the program. He and House Speaker Craig DeRoche (R-Novi) and Rep. Rick Baxter (R-Concord) will appear at a Meijer's store in Okemos to both encourage people to sign up and help them make a decision on what plan they should consider.

Nationally, an estimated 6.5 million elderly who would be eligible for the plan have not yet signed up.

Ms. Stabenow said there are some 70 plans for individuals to choose from and many people are still confused over what plans to take.

A study also indicates that 60 percent of the callers to the federal government's Medicare help line have gotten inaccurate information, Ms. Stabenow said. "If the government can't get its act together, why should people be penalized for that?" Ms. Stabenow said.

Ms. Stabenow said her proposal would both extend the sign up period until December 31 and allow individuals to switch plans once during the first year without penalty. There have been concerns that some people will find that once they sign up for a plan that the conditions of the plan will change and cost them more, Ms. Stabenow said.

With the deadline for signups looming, Ms. Stabenow was asked why she was focusing on extending the timeline to sign up instead of encouraging people to sign up for the plan. Ms. Stabenow said she actually had been encouraging an extension of the deadline since the winter.

Senior citizens will still be able to sign up for a plan after Monday, but not without financial penalty.

Ms. Stabenow is running for re-election and Republicans criticized her Tuesday for refusing to vote for cloture on the proposed medical liability bill that the administration of President George W. Bush has said will help save on medical costs, but that Democrats have criticized as too limiting.

Published May 10, 2006

[From the Lansing State Journal]

Mark Reinstein: Medicare drug plan can be improved

With many Medicare beneficiaries facing an enrollment deadline for the federal Medicare Part D drug benefit, what can be drawn from the program so far?

After almost six months of Part D experience, some observations can be made, based on information from varied sources, including a Part D problem-reporting service operated by the Mental Health Association in Michigan:

- In the first few months of 2006, Michigan was spared some of the chaos seen in other states. This was partly because of good record-keeping and reporting to the federal government by Michigan officials.

It also stemmed from the fact that Michigan, with its strong labor history, has a much higher proportion of Medicare beneficiaries with drug coverage from former employers than does the rest of the country.

- Many Michigan citizens have nonetheless experienced Part D difficulties. Confusion is at or near the top of the list, with multiple private drug plans - and their differing procedures - to contact, learn about and analyze.

Congress may wish to establish a centralized enrollment process for Part D, where everyone goes through a single source for plan information and facilitation of enrollment. Yes, this would cost some money. But the Part D program has created a long-term federal obligation of billions upon billions of dollars; spending a little more to make data-gathering and decision-making easier could be a tremendous boon.

- The federal government claims Part D has been a significant cost-saver for Medicare beneficiaries. That may ultimately prove correct, but we have encountered numerous beneficiaries who say they were previously in a drug assistance program (such as those offered by pharmaceutical companies or the EPIC program Michigan formerly had for low-income seniors), and their various expenses under Part D

are now higher than before.

- Part D repeats one of the great fallacies of private-sector drug management. It considers a drug "covered" if you can theoretically get it through the plan, no matter how many administrative access hoops you have to jump through first. Thus, even though federal "guidance" is that all or substantially all drugs be available in certain classes (including three mental health categories), many beneficiaries have great difficulty gaining bureaucratic approval or meeting co-pay requirements.

- It is impossible for the federal government to stay on top of everything happening in each prescription drug plan under Part D. Congress may wish to enable state Medicaid programs to receive more information about and have some regulatory involvement with plans that serve persons dually enrolled in Medicaid and Medicare.

Whatever changes Congress might make, you can have a voice in them by contacting the Mental Health Association's problem-reporting service at (866) 779-1359 or partdmha@aol.com.

Mark Reinstein

is president of the Southfield-based Mental Health Association in Michigan,
a United Way-funded, statewide advocacy group

G.O.P. Sees Big Voting Bloc Flocking to Drug Program

By JIM RUTENBERG and MARJORIE CONNELLY

The New York Times

Published: May 10, 2006

SUN CITY CENTER, Fla., May 9 — A few months ago, President Bush's prescription drug plan seemed to be another White House initiative going wrong. The people it was intended to help complained that the plan was too complicated. Conservatives complained that it was a giant giveaway.



Paul J. Richards/Agence France-Presse — Getty Images

Gov. Jeb Bush saying goodbye to his brother the president Tuesday at MacDill Air Force Base near Tampa after a Medicare drug plan event.



Jason Reed/Reuters

Representatives Katherine Harris and Adam H. Putnam, both Florida Republicans, with Governor Bush at MacDill Air Force Base.

This week, Mr. Bush is storming through this state, rich with older residents, as the main salesman for a plan that aides say is now emerging as a surprise plus for Republicans in a rocky election season.

Rather than angering a crucial bloc, aides say, the plan gives older voters, who go to the polls more reliably than younger ones, something that always endears politicians to constituents — money in the pocket.

"I think it's going to be value added as we go forward," Dan Bartlett, the White House counselor, said at the end of a presidential event here encouraging people to sign up for the program before the deadline on Monday. Asked whether Republicans should promote the plan as they campaign this summer, Mr. Bartlett said, "They'd be smart to."

The calculation, accurate or not, represents a marked shift in thinking on the plan, which emerged as a potential hurdle for Republicans as people voiced growing frustration about complicated enrollment.

Democrats say Republicans are fooling themselves if they now believe that the plan will help them in November, saying people continue to complain about it, especially about the deadline. White House officials point to anecdotal evidence that the program is growing in popularity as people pass through the enrollment difficulties and into the savings the different subplans offer.

The latest New York Times/CBS News Poll seems to support their argument that opinion is turning. Many respondents who said they had signed up said their expenses for prescription drugs decreased — 42 percent, against 19 percent who said they were paying more.

Twice as many older people said the program would reduce costs as voiced that expectation in December, 40 percent now compared with 20 percent then, according to the poll.

The nationwide telephone poll was conducted May 4-8 with 1,241 adults, including 500 respondents 65 and older. The margin of sampling error for those respondents is plus or minus 4 percentage points.

Opinion is shifting after a concerted effort by the White House and other Republicans to embrace and promote the program.

But the poll shows that serious problems remain. Three-quarters of those 65 and older interviewed said it was difficult or somewhat difficult to understand. And 81 percent of those 65 and older said the deadline should be extended.

At a meeting at a center for the elderly here where Mr. Bush took questions from the audience, Janet Wilson, 79, asked him to extend the deadline, citing problems in the sign-up system.

"I would beg — not for myself — because there were logjams," Ms. Wilson said. "They were shuffling the phone calls directly to Medicare."

Mr. Bush replied: "Deadlines are important. Deadlines help people understand there's finality, and people need to get after it, you know?"

Another woman in the mostly friendly audience offered an upbeat opinion, telling the president, "I'm saving some \$140 a month."

Representative Rahm Emanuel, chairman of the Democratic Congressional Campaign Committee, acknowledged that such sentiment was growing.

But, Mr. Emanuel said, "It's up to 40 percent, but that's still a net negative."

Pat Toomey, president of the Club for Growth, an economically conservative group, said that whatever gains the program might give to Republicans from older voters would be negated, at best, by losses among the conservatives who make up the core Republican vote in nonpresidential elections.

"I'm very skeptical that this will be a net positive," Mr. Toomey said. "I think to hold onto the majorities, Republicans have to do something to demonstrate a renewed commitment to limited government, and touting the prescription drug plan is not going to do that."

But Mr. Bush is planning to keep doing just that, starting with another event promoting the benefit on Wednesday in Orlando.

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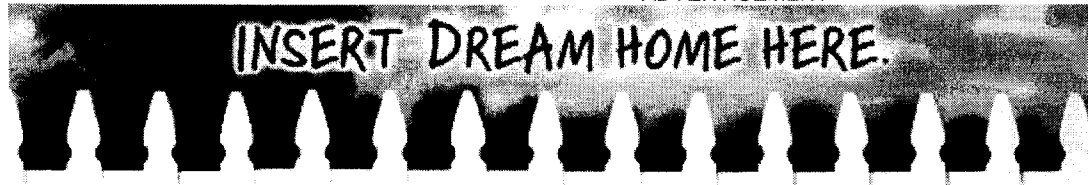
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Published May 10, 2006

The uninsured life

From low-cost clinics to community health plans, learn how some keep healthy when insurance isn't an option

- Christian Czerwinski NOISE

Jaime Wilkins wants a family someday.

To ensure that, the 28-year-old, who runs Code of the Cutz in East Lansing, needs a surgery that could help determine if she can have children. Doctors told her she should have it "right away" in October.

But like 46 million other Americans who don't have health insurance, lack of medical care could jeopardize that dream. For a single person, a basic health insurance plan -- which includes doctor visits, prescriptions and major medical coverage -- could run anywhere from about \$100 to \$200 a month, said Vicki A. Boyd, an account representative at Greg Lemanski State Farm in Lansing. For Wilkins, it would cost even more.

"I have a heart condition and the only insurance I could get was too expensive. It would be \$300 a month," Wilkins said. "I work. I pay my taxes and I'm a productive member of the community. It's not like I sit on my butt and watch 'Oprah' and eat Bon Bons. If they tell me I can't have kids, I'll be pissed."

Wilkins is on the Ingham Health Plan, a community-based program that helps pay for doctor visits and prescriptions. The



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plan helps, but it's not insurance. When she injured tendons in her left wrist recently playing soccer, she didn't have the money to get proper treatment. She wears a brace that keeps the arm stable. She hasn't had insurance for about five years.

"It's insanely frustrating because I have to get assistance and some people treat me like a second-class citizen," she said. "I'm in pain and I need the surgery. I don't want to be on painkillers the rest of my life."

Living without

About 11 percent of Michigan residents don't have insurance, according to a report by the New Jersey-based Robert Wood Johnson Foundation.

The National Coalition on Health Care found that about 15.7 percent of the nation's population went without health insurance in 2004 -- an increase of 6 million people since 2000. Millions of workers don't have access to coverage, the coalition found, and young adults (ages 18 to 24) remained the least likely of any age group to have health insurance, with 31.4 percent going without.

The primary reason is the rising cost of health care. In 2004, \$1.9 trillion was spent on health care in the United States. That amount is expected to more than double to \$4 trillion by 2015.

A simple cold or a broken bone can lead to expensive medical bills for those who don't have or can't pay for insurance and who have to pay out of pocket. And if they delay their care -- as is often the case -- it can also result in more serious diseases being diagnosed in later stages, resulting in complications in treatment.

For those who do pay for their insurance out-of-pocket, the high cost can sometimes force families or couples to neglect other debts, such as mortgage, rent or car payments.

"We believe that the increases in health insurance are affecting the American family personally and profoundly," said Joel Miller, NCHC senior vice president of operations. "It's a major national economic problem. Rising costs and premiums have become a bigger problems and annual health care spending has been increasing three times the rate of inflation."

Acknowledging the issue, Gov. Jennifer Granholm proposed the Michigan First Healthcare Plan in this year's State of the State address. The plan would aim to expand health coverage to more than half a million of the state's uninsured at a cost of nearly \$1 billion.

While that seems staggering, consider that the U.S. spends nearly \$100 billion per year to provide uninsured residents with health services, often for diseases that with earlier diagnosis could be prevented or treated more efficiently, the NCHC study found.

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"As long as we continue to see the rapid escalation of health insurance, workers will be paying a few hundred dollars more every year. That kind of extraordinary escalation has affected several segments of the economy, slowing the rate of job growth by making it more expensive for companies to add new workers," Miller said.

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'Hope it doesn't happen'

Power

But health insurance isn't a pressing concern for some twentysomethings. They would rather spend their money on things like entertainment, cars or clothes than on policies they feel they may never need. The insurance industry terms them "young invincibles." Others realize it could eventually be a problem.

Ali Wilkinson, 25, of Lansing, works as a hair stylist and can't afford insurance. Her employers don't offer it either.

Though her father is a doctor, Wilkinson doesn't know what she'd do if she was diagnosed with a disease or in an accident.

"I'd have to ask my family for help. I wouldn't be able to afford the cost," she said. "I really don't know what I would do. It's one of those worries in the back of your mind, and you just kind of hope it doesn't happen."

Unlike Wilkinson, Molly Peterman, 25, of Lansing has health insurance -- but only for six months out of the year. She gets coverage when she plays professional basketball in Europe. Her waitress job in the off-season doesn't offer it.

"The last time I got injured, I had to go to a side clinic for X-rays. It's a big inconvenience," she said. "My sister has insurance through work and would consider other jobs but one of the main reasons she doesn't is because of her insurance."

Too high a cost

Increasingly, businesses are dropping health insurance, said Charles Owens, Michigan director of the National Federation of Independent Business.

"Some employers will throw up their hands in frustration and say 'I'll give you the money, you go find it yourself,'" he said.

Only about three in five businesses offer coverage to their employees, a survey by the Kaiser Family Foundation and Health Research and Educational Trust found.

For the businesses that do offer coverage, many are expecting workers to shoulder more of the costs. Premiums for employer-sponsored health insurance plans jumped 9.2 percent in 2005, the survey said, and annual premiums for family coverage hit \$10,880 in 2005. According to the NCHC, that number could climb to \$16,000 by 2010.

Even if insurance is a killer on your wallet, there are certain essentials to look for when buying it out-of-pocket. A basic plan should always cover major medical, says State Farm's Boyd, which

includes "the big stuff" such as trips to the hospital for accidents or illnesses.

"It's the lack of major medical that can destroy your financial future. If you get the flu ... it's not so bad, but if you need a \$15,000 operation, you could be paying it off for years," she said.

Alan Stark, owner of Stark Agency, said a lifetime maximum, or a ceiling/cap, on insurance plans is also important. People should also opt for the highest deductible they can afford because that lowers the monthly fees. A basic plan could carry a \$5 million cap with a \$250 or \$500 deductible.

Finding low-cost care

Even if you don't have health insurance, there are many clinics and services in the Lansing area that offer care at reduced costs. Care Free Medical Inc. operates two sites locally that provide basic medical services. Medical director Dr. Barry Saltman said about 3,000 patients come to the center.

"There are lots of people with no insurance who cannot find a doctor. Over 500 women and children go to emergency rooms every week that should not be there, because they should be at a doctor's office," Saltman said.

In its two years of operation, the clinic's doctors -- who are volunteers -- have detected cancer in seven people, all who've gone on to receive care.

"We found that young couples are working, but they cannot afford health care or the insurance that would allow them to have health care," Saltman said.

Sherry Kohlmann, academic team leader for the Lansing Community College Dental Hygiene Program, has seen increased numbers during the class's clinics, which offer an array of dental hygiene services and assessments for as low as \$30 a visit.

"We have a real mix of people who are uninsured and the service is very complete and thorough. Everything our students do is checked by a dental hygienist," Kohlmann said.

But even such affordable care isn't a safeguard against the unforeseen injury or illness that can lead to seemingly unending medical bills.

"I had surgery on my wrist about a year ago, and I'm still paying for it," said Deanna Riolo, 26, who works retail in Lansing.

"I needed the surgery so I could do my job. But with living expenses and paying my rent, the hospital bills are still not paid."

Low-cost health care

Adult Health Center

5303 S. Cedar St., Lansing, 887-4320

8 a.m. to noon and 1 to 5 p.m. weekdays

Care Free Medical Inc.

790 E Columbia St., Mason, 244-0120
3333 Pennsylvania Ave., Lansing, 887-5922
Call for hours

Family Health Clinic at Cristo Rey Community Center

1717 N. High St., Lansing, 371-1700
8 a.m. to 5 p.m. weekdays (until 6 p.m. Tuesdays)

Lansing Community College dental clinic

515 N. Washington Square, Lansing, 483-1458
8 a.m. to noon and 1 to 5 p.m. Thursdays

The Ingham Health Plan

A community-sponsored program that helps uninsured people get health care services. Call (866) 291-8691 for details.

Womancare of Lansing

3401 E. Saginaw Highway, Suite 107, Lansing, 337-7350
9 a.m. to 5 p.m. weekdays, 8 a.m. to noon Saturdays

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12 Boys Accused In Sexual Assault Of 2nd-Grader

One Teacher Fired, Another Suspended

POSTED: 8:31 am EDT May 10, 2006

ST. LOUIS -- Twelve boys in the first and second grade at a St. Louis elementary school are accused of sexually assaulting a second-grade girl during recess, authorities said Tuesday.

One teacher who was supposed to be supervising the recess has been fired, and another suspended with pay, school Superintendent Creg Williams said. Ten of the boys, ages 6 to 8, were suspended for the rest of the school year, and the other two received five-day, in-school suspensions.

No names were released.

The girl, who is 8, was unharmed physically but will not return for the rest of the school year. "We don't know what type of emotional scars it will have on the young lady," Williams said.

The incident happened Friday at Columbia Accelerated Community Educational Center, a school with 400 students in pre-kindergarten through sixth grade on the city's north side.

During the recess shortly after lunch, a student saw several boys huddled around the girl who was on the ground, and alerted a teacher.

Police turned the investigation over to juvenile authorities. A court official said the boys could face misdemeanor counts of sexual misconduct and assault.

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Police: Teen Fled With Man From Internet

Amber Alert Canceled After Girl Found Safe

POSTED: 8:42 am EDT May 10, 2006

UPDATED: 10:33 am EDT May 10, 2006

A 13-year-old Harrison Township girl is returning home Wednesday after her disappearance with a man she met on the Internet prompted an Amber Alert overnight. The girl met Steven Builta, 25, of Hammond, Ind., on the Web site MySpace.com, according to police. Builta tried to drive the girl to his hometown in Indiana, but police caught up with the pair along Interstate 94 in Kalamazoo County, Local 4 reported. The Amber Alert was issued at about 12:25 a.m. and canceled by 1:41 a.m., according to police.

Investigators are considering whether Builta will face charges.

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Neighborhood watchdogs target truant teens

Wednesday, May 10, 2006

By Theresa D. McClellan
The Grand Rapids Press

GRAND RAPIDS -- A crime-prevention organizer for the Southeast Side neighborhood known as South Hills is calling for the city's help.

Brian Prevost claims truant teenagers are "terrorizing the community" by breaking into homes and vandalizing property, undermining revitalization in the area.

On Tuesday, his concern sent him to the City Commission's Public Safety Committee, asking for an ordinance on truancy that would slap parents whose teens roam the streets.

The committee received a letter from a former resident whose home had been robbed numerous times.

The problem, Prevost said, stems from youths ages 10 to 18 who "have somehow fallen through the cracks."

He said the teens are on the streets during the day, robbing homes, smashing car windows and stealing stereo equipment and whatever else they can grab.

Grand Rapids police Capt. James Farris said officers made eight arrests in the neighborhood recently, and a search warrant netted some property taken from the resident whose letter was given to the committee.

Yet Prevost said he and other neighbors are frustrated because the crime continues and is threatening what could be a good thing.

The 14-block area is a mix of manicured lawns and renovated homes, with some homes in disrepair. Residents who have been there for a half-century have seen area population ebb and flow.

Things are flowing again, with new residents coming in and putting money into their homes, and old neighbors feeling comfortable enough to return to their front porches.

Prevost calls the neighborhood "Little Benetton," after the diverse global village represented in clothing ads for Colors of Benetton.

"We're encouraging everyone to come here so we have Hispanics, whites, African Americans, gays, young professionals. But we've had a woman broken into four times in a six-month period. It's like modern-day terrorism, and it's getting worse in the past year," Prevost said.

City Commissioner James Jendrasiak, who sits on the committee, said the truancy problem should be spearheaded by the police and the schools.

Grand Rapids Police Chief Harry Dolan, who reports to the committee, noted students dropping out of school is problematic.

Teresa Neal, assistant to the superintendent for community affairs at Grand Rapids Public Schools, said she was shocked to hear about the neighbors' description.

"I didn't know we had an issue with kids terrorizing communities."

Larry Johnson, head of security for the schools, said truancy is an issue everywhere.

"I think this may be an excellent opportunity for the community, for the school and for the city liaison committee to have a frank conversation about a daytime truancy ordinance. That would give police a little bit more to deal with," Johnson said.

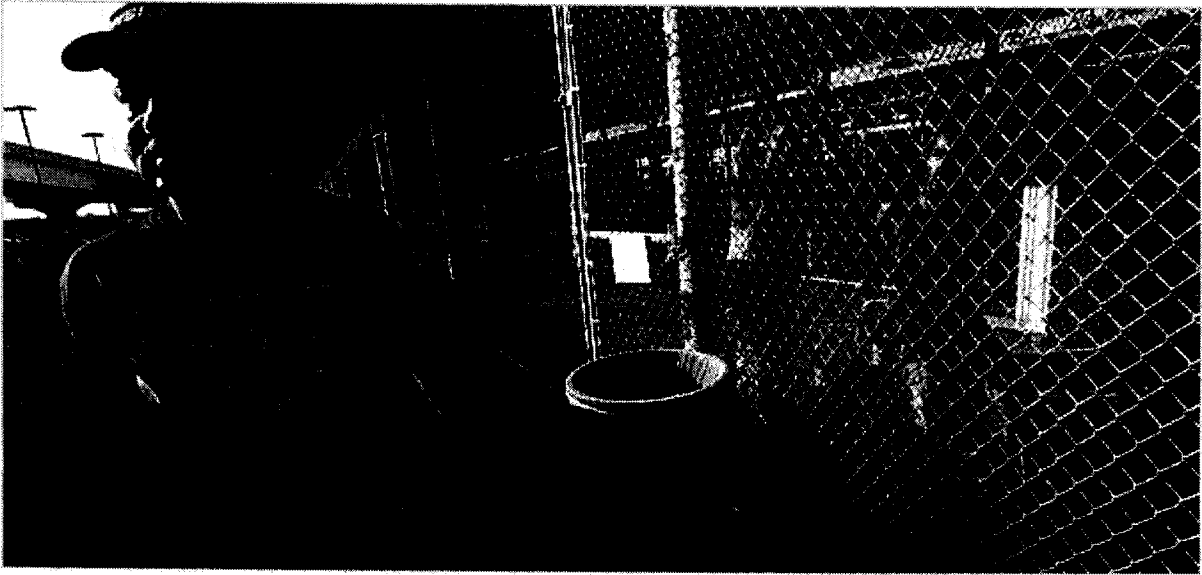
He said the key factor is "to find out why kids are not coming to school, and that's a national issue. Some kids feel a sense of hopelessness, some kids say they don't feel safe at school. Some feel totally disconnected to the school for various reasons," said the former city police officer.

He said the city and schools have to identify the reasons "and have programs to make kids feel invited." As for kids feeling unsafe in the schools, "I'm telling you, the safest place for a child is in school."

Johnson said residents concerned about truant children can call his office, 819-2100.

"We will send a car for a school-age child, and we encourage them to call the police department."

Teenage Prisoners Describe Hurricane Horrors



By ADAM NOSSITER

The New York Times

Published: May 10, 2006

NEW ORLEANS, May 9 — More than 100 teenagers held in detention during Hurricane Katrina endured horrific conditions in the storm's aftermath, including standing for hours in filthy floodwater, having nothing to eat and drink for three to five days, and being forced to consume the waters as a result, according to a report released here Tuesday.



Lynette Robertson appeared Tuesday with her son Eddie Fenceroy, who said he was trapped at the Orleans Parish Prison during Hurricane Katrina.

The report was prepared by the Juvenile Justice Project of Louisiana, a group that has long advocated changes in the state's troubled juvenile system. It was based on interviews with more than 60 teenagers held at the Orleans Parish Prison during the storm, as well as with prison staff members.

Youths who were interviewed described water rising in their darkened cells and a scramble onto top bunks to avoid it. They also said that when they were finally rescued — in some cases, after several days — they experienced dizziness and dehydration because of lack of food. One reported being "roped together" with plastic handcuffs as he and others were led out through neck-high water.

"There was food floating in the water and we tried to catch it and eat it; that's how hungry we were," said one 15-year-old identified as E. F. in the report.

T. G., 16, said, "Kids were going crazy, shaking their cells for food and water."

Another youth, R. S., 16, said: "We went five days without eating. Kids were passing out in their cells."

Among the many wrenching stories of evacuation after Hurricane Katrina, including the chaotic removal of more than 7,000 prisoners from the Orleans Parish Prison, that of the teenagers ranks as one of the more disturbing — an anarchic portrait of about 150 youthful inmates fending for themselves in dire conditions.

The prison was under the supervision of Marlin Gusman, the Orleans Parish criminal sheriff, who, through a spokeswoman, declined to respond to the report. The authors of the report said city and parish officials should have ordered the prison to be evacuated but lacked a formal plan to do so.

The report described what happened after the storm as symptomatic of a juvenile justice system recognized as one of the country's worst, an outpost of a sprawling prison empire where more people were locked up, per capita, than in any other state.

Only a week ago, a federal judge in Baton Rouge released the juvenile system from Justice Department control, six years after Louisiana was ordered to make changes and after numerous investigations and lawsuits. Several youth prisons in the state had achieved infamy as places of routine beatings and systematic deprivation, and federal authorities concluded that conditions were unconstitutional.

For years, advocates and a handful of state legislators had pushed for an overhaul but had met with resistance from state prison bureaucrats and indifference from elected Louisiana officials. Finally, the Legislature agreed in 2003 to a series of changes, shutting down the most notorious youth prison, in the northern part of the state.

At the same time, Louisiana agreed to move away from simply locking up hundreds of teenage offenders, instituting a more residential model of incarceration, as other states were doing.

But those changes, while lauded by advocates, were not all in place in August of last year, and the teenagers taken handcuffed and shackled to the Orleans Parish Prison ahead of the hurricane were exposed to the deficiencies of the old system.

"They left us in there with no food and no water," said Eddie Fenceroy, 15, a former detainee against whom charges have since been dismissed, advocates said.

Mr. Fenceroy described standing in the floodwater for "a whole day" before being rescued. "Some people were drinking the water," he said.

The advocacy group's director, David J. Utter, said that in a telephone conversation Monday evening, Sheriff Gusman pledged not to continue holding juveniles in the jail system here.

Woman pleads no contest, agrees to repay elderly couple

She's called opportunist for stealing from disabled couple in their 90s

PUBLISHED: May 10, 2006

By Jameson Cook
Macomb Daily Staff Writer

A woman accused of stealing \$30,000 from a disabled Shelby Township couple in their 90s pleaded no contest to embezzlement of a vulnerable adult and likely will serve probation.

Meissema Godboldo, 39, made the plea Monday and will be sentenced June 13 in Macomb County Circuit Court, where Judge Richard Caretti is expected to order her to a probation term and repay all of the money.

Even though the maximum penalty for the charge is 10 years in prison, Godboldo likely will receive no incarceration since she has no prior criminal record and has agreed to pay restitution of the money, according to assistant Macomb prosecutor John Latella. She already has secured a job as a manager at a McDonald's restaurant to help her start repayments, Latella said.

Godboldo likely will be sentenced under a "Cobb's agreement," a deal between the defendant and judge, excluding the prosecution.

The 91-year-old woman who is blind and 95-year-old man who has dementia had moved from Arizona to Michigan, where they spent most of their lives, and hired a company to provide personal services. An employee of the company, Godboldo was assigned to them and met them at the airport when they arrived from Arizona. After working for them through the company for a period of time, she convinced them to work and be paid privately.

Latella said Godboldo had the couple endorse checks written to her,

and she used that money to pay her expenses, such as mortgage payments for her Detroit home.

"I think she was an opportunist," Latella said. "She was having some financial problems and saw an opportunity."

Despite being blind, the woman was mentally sharp and suspected wrongdoing, Latella said. She went to a local branch of her bank, where she and a bank official discovered the improper payments. She first went to Utica police, then was directed to Shelby Township police, which investigated.

Since the incident, the couple, who had been living in an apartment, have moved into a Rochester Hills nursing home.

Godboldo has moved to Southfield, Latella said.

The case included an unusual court proceeding due to the couple's physical condition. The woman victim's testimony in 41A District Court in Shelby Township was heard in court over the telephone, using a conference call feature, Latella said.

Wednesday, May 10, 2006

The Detroit News

Neal Rubin:

Feeding the needy is as easy as putting food near mailbox



Someone spotted the first mail truck and someone else cued the marching band, and just that quickly, the celebration was under way at Gleaners Community Food Bank in Detroit.

One mail truck motors past and you probably don't notice. Put 50 U.S. Postal Service vehicles in a line, roll them up Beaufait Street with a police escort and get the Sousaphones from Taylor Truman High School blasting "Shake," and now people will pay attention.

This was the kickoff of the kickoff Tuesday morning for the world's easiest charity campaign, the 14th annual National Association of Letter Carriers (NALC) Food Drive. It takes place Saturday, and here's your role, if you'd be so kind, in its entirety:

Put some nonperishable food items in a bag. Cans of soup, boxes of macaroni and cheese, plastic jars of pineapple chunks, whatever you feel like parting with.

Put the bag next to your mailbox.

Voila. You're done.

Whipping up enthusiasm

The men and women of the NALC will do the rest, with the assistance of managers, Teamsters, volunteers and some teenagers who might not otherwise be out of bed until 2 p.m. They'll collect the food -- 71 million pounds nationally last year, 1 million pounds here -- and haul it to food banks across southeast Michigan.

In short order, it will make its way into the homes of people who otherwise might have nothing to eat, or worse yet, nothing to feed their children.

"When we call 911 at our house," said Sandy Laemmel, "the pizza delivery guy shows up." Everyone laughed, and then the president of NALC Branch One got serious.

Many of the people standing in line at food pantries, she pointed out, are among the working poor -- men and women who hold down one job or even two or three, and still need help just to get by. "That's a sad state of affairs," she said, and a good reason to maybe fill another bag.

Laemmel had the podium after the trucks parked and the band put down its instruments, when everyone had trooped inside the Gleaners warehouse and a half-dozen speakers were whipping up enthusiasm like meringue.

I should point out that I'm on the advisory board of Gleaners and that I was among the whippers, though to continue the metaphor, my meringue didn't have quite the stiff peaks that others' did.

Kelly Sigmon, senior plant manager for the Royal Oak postal district, told everyone of her immigrant grandparents in Chicago and how one viciously cold Christmas they had to choose between paying for rent, food or heat.

Heat lost out, but as they huddled in bed, they heard a knock at the door. When they answered it, they found a bag of coal sitting on the stoop.

"One thing they learned about America," she said -- and one thing Sigmon knows -- is that whatever else might be in short supply, there's an abundant ration of compassion.

'Best day of the year'

Paul Roznowski said his teenagers, Ben and Blayne, get so fired up for the food drive that they'll bounce out of bed at 6 a.m. to help. Roznowski, president of Royal Oak Branch 3126, will walk his route in the south part of the city -- ZIP code 48067 -- with an old-fashioned pushcart, tossing aboard grocery bags as he goes.

By Saturday afternoon, he'll feel every step, but he'll feel darned good about it. "People don't realize," he said, "but this is our best day of the year."

A few minutes later the program ended, and the Truman TNT band marched everyone out the door. In the back row, a sophomore named Bryan Brennan punctuated the tune with a set of cymbals.

It was a simple thing, comparatively, not unlike the NALC food drive. And the score wouldn't have been the same without him.

Neal Rubin appears Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday and Friday. You can reach him at (313) 222-1874 or nrubin@detnews.com.

Postal food drive Saturday

Wednesday, May 10, 2006

Muskegon Chronicle

This weekend, the U.S. Postal Service is asking for more weight to carry in mailbags and trucks.

Letter carriers will collect non-perishable food donations from postal customers along their routes on Saturday. All donations will be delivered to 36 local food banks and pantries to help families in need.

This is the 13th year the Muskegon area has hosted the drive. Participating post office locations are Bitely, Fremont, Fruitport, Grand Haven, Grant, Hesperia, Montague, Muskegon, Muskegon Heights, Ravenna, Spring Lake, and Twin Lake.

Residents are asked to leave their food donations in a bag near their mailbox before their letter carrier arrives.

The event is made possible with the help of numerous volunteers who assist collection at the various post offices. In 2005, more than 129,000 pounds of food was collected in the Muskegon area.

Students dig into hunger, homelessness

Monroe News

By: Michael Neary

Story updated May 10, 2006 11:27AM

Meadow Montessori School plunged into the Association of Independent Michigan Schools (AIMS) Literacy Project last week with discussions that riveted students and sparked a flurry of questions.

The 29 Michigan schools that belong to AIMS declared May 3 as Literacy Day, a day to launch projects focusing on literacy struggles.

Rather than zeroing in on literacy in isolation, organizers at Meadow Montessori looked at a cluster of social issues that included homelessness and hunger.

Students also donated food to God Works! and each Friday until the end of the school year they will bring in books to donate, as well.

Students were receptive to the weighty cluster of topics.

"I feel kind of sad for homeless people," said Antonia Piedmonte-Lang, a 9-year-old fourth-grader who spoke slowly and thoughtfully after one of the day's discussions had ended. "Some people from other soup kitchens have visited before, but I didn't know it was this bad."

Antonia and other students from grades four through nine had listened to a presentation from Jeff Weaver, president of God Works! and an organizer of the county's soup kitchens. He had mentioned that between 80 and 100 people typically attend dinner at one of the soup kitchens each night.

The service component of the project is taking off in other ways, as well. Middle school teacher Pat Gruber has teamed up with Rob Peven, farm program coordinator, to help students expand their organic garden with an eye toward harvesting and donating the food.

The garden's purpose, according to Ms. Gruber, is to demonstrate farming techniques to students.

"A further extension," she said, "is to produce enough food to give away."

Mr. Weaver stressed, in his morning talk, the way small groups of people came together to contribute to the soup kitchen last October when it began. He explained that churches donated dining spaces, a doctor paid for a hefty portion of the meals and volunteers handled the serving.

"It was kind of a desperate plan because we really didn't have any money," he said.

The talk ignited the interest of the young students who launched a barrage of questions: Are meals other than dinner served? How big are the churches? What kind of food is served? Are donations of utensils needed?

And later a student asked, "How could people have a job if they don't have a house?"

Mr. Weaver had mentioned that homeless people include the "working poor."

Matt Hnilica, an 18-year-old senior, has helped organize the events.

"One of the graduation requirements is that I have to be a leader (and) to start something new," he said.

In some ways, though, the concepts discussed did not seem new to the students. They seemed comfortable throughout the morning and afternoon - and they seemed eager to talk about even the thorniest of social problems.

Darcy Piedmonte, who teaches grades four through six, said the general concepts had emerged in her classes.

"I have kids who study American history," she said, "so we decided to look at it from the angle of labor history, economics and the minimum wage."

Former day-care operator may get life term

Wednesday, May 10, 2006

The Grand Rapids Press

GRAND RAPIDS -- A former day-care operator pleaded no contest Tuesday to first-degree sexual assault of children in his home.

Kristopher Cross, 34, faces up to life in prison when sentenced June 27 by Kent County Circuit Judge Paul Sullivan. Cross was accused of sexually assaulting three girls between 2002 and 2004 in the house he owned with his wife at 2642 Fuller Ave. NE, which was licensed to care for 12 children.

Cross was scheduled to stand trial on multiple charges before he entered his plea. Assistant Kent County Prosecutor Kevin Bramble said the first-degree sexual assault charge involved girls who were about 3 and 5.

Bramble said he was satisfied with the plea agreement, and that children would not have to testify.

The case raised extra concerns because Cross and his wife, Amanda, were able to buy another day-care center while he was under investigation for sexual assault. They also were allowed to keep their own day care open despite the discovery of pornography on Cross' home computer and a state worker's recommendation to revoke the license.

Cross was charged in September, four years after the first allegation of abuse was raised.

United Way has 'difficult' time Fewer programs get money this year than last

Wednesday, May 10, 2006

By Aaron Foley
afoley@citpat.com -- 768-4944

"Difficult" was the word of the day when United Way of Jackson County officials described the process of allocating funds in the wake of overwhelming requests for dollars.

About \$940,000 was given to 33 community-based programs for the first year of the 2006-09 grant cycle, down from \$1.3 million awarded to 39 programs last year, officials said. Twenty requests were not funded this year.

About 50 agencies had asked United Way for about \$2.8 million total.

"There is not enough money to meet all the needs," Mike Shore, the organization's board president, said at a press conference Tuesday afternoon.

United Way raised about \$3 million in its 2005 campaign, said Ken Toll, executive director. Toll said about \$500,000 will be used for the organization's own initiatives, including Success by Six and the 211 hotline for health and human services assistance.

"We think these should yield higher results, but it is painful to programs this year," he said.

Toll also attributed the lack of funding to increased operational costs for United Way, as well as ripple effects from other agencies' budget crises. Cuts in school districts and government offices can lead to more pressure on United Way to fill those gaps, he said.

Toll said the organization is focusing on improving programs that help children offset problems they may have later in life.

"If we can intervene early in these children's lives, we can make a difference," he said.

Funding for adult programs in particular went down almost half from last year.

The allocation decisions were made by the United Way's volunteer councils about six weeks ago.

Jean Ann Hughes, CEO of the Girl Scouts' Irish Hills Council, said her organization applied for a \$60,000 grant this year for a program for younger girls in the organization but got \$9,000.

"We're pleased that we're able to get some allocation from the United Way," Hughes said. "Every dollar helps, but it's a tremendous difference from what we applied for."

Richard Dodge, who serves on the youth volunteer council, said it was a hard process.

"It's always a difficult decision to make when you're trying to support all the people in a meaningful way," Dodge said.

-- Staff writer Susan J. Demas contributed to this story.

Lansing State Journal

May 10, 2006

A job - and 'blessed'

On April 20, I wrote about the frustration of Gail and Howard Church, who, due to a string of bad luck, found themselves jobless and in need of state assistance.

The fact that their call to a customer help line of the state Department of Human Services ended up in India pushed the Churches over the edge.

What were the state's phone-answering jobs doing in India, they asked, when people in Michigan couldn't find work?

Well, that column caught the eye of Bruce Newton, administrator of Peoples Church in East Lansing.

Howard Church, as you may recall, had 25 years of experience in maintenance work, and Newton was looking for a maintenance man.

They got together and Howard started work Monday at Peoples Church.

"We can't tell you what a relief this is," Gail said.

"We'll be able to get off the backs of the citizens of Michigan, and fend for ourselves. What a glorious day this is. How blessed we feel."

What do you think? Call John Schneider at 377-1175, send a fax to 377-1298 or e-mail jschneid@lsj.com.

Include your name, phone number, city or township.

Bay City Times

People's forum

Wednesday, May 10, 2006

Foster parents

Voice: Karen A. Tighe, judge of Probate and Family Court, Bay City

May has been designated as National Foster Care Month. I would like to publicly call attention to the wonderful folks in this community who have become licensed foster parents. The family court, which deals with abused and neglected children, could not operate without them.

The Bay County Department of Human Services has participated in the Family to Family program for a few years now. This program recruits foster families from the neighborhoods where neglect is most prevalent. We have been able to ensure that children are not moved far from home; and we have increased the number of "relative placements." In 2005, 70 children from Bay County were placed into foster care, and 53 percent of those children were able to be placed with a relative. For those children who do not have suitable relatives nearby, we need good, caring people who are willing to go through the licensing process to become foster parents.

Giving children boundaries, attention, love and guidance, and then watching them bloom is the most rewarding work on this earth. Foster parents work miracles with children. I have seen many cases where the child comes into care hopeless and broken, either physically or emotionally. It always amazes me to see the rapid progress toward wholeness and happiness that occurs when a child is matched with a loving family.

The goal in most cases is to re-educate the birth parent and reunify the family. Foster parents play a critical role in facilitating parent-child visits and enabling

children to remain in their same school. When the goal of reunification does not work, most often it is the foster parent or relative who volunteers to adopt the child.

Every effort toward improving the life of a child helps mend the fabric of our community. This is why foster parents are my personal heroes.



JENNIFER M. GRANHOLM
GOVERNOR

STATE OF MICHIGAN
MICHIGAN DEPARTMENT OF HUMAN SERVICES
LANSING



MARIANNE UDOW
DIRECTOR

News Release

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Michigan one of six states chosen to participate in National Governor's Association Policy Academy

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LANSING – Governor Jennifer M. Granholm today announced that Michigan was one of six states chosen to participate in the National Governors Association Center for Best Practices Policy Academy on Youth Transitioning Out of Foster Care. Over the next year, the six participating states will have the opportunity to learn about important research, promising practices and state policy options for addressing the needs of youths in foster care.

Michigan was selected because of its demonstrated commitment to this issue and the progress it has already made toward improving outcomes for older youths in care.

While foster care is a temporary placement for some, other children remain in the state's care for several years and do not find a permanent home. Nearly 500 teens "aged out" of the foster care system in Michigan in the past year, thrusting them into independence without stable, permanent relationships with adults who can help them with some of life's toughest decisions.

"Foster children need the guidance of adults throughout their life – not just until they reach age 18," Granholm said. "Fostering permanent, lifelong connections to caring adults is perhaps the most important thing we can do to make a difference in the life of a young person who is leaving the foster care system."

The state of Michigan recognizes the critical importance of prioritizing supports and services for foster children that are transitioning to adulthood. Over the past four years, Michigan has become increasingly aware of its responsibility to appropriately support and nurture foster youths.

The State Youth Policy Board, an active and highly effective group of leaders from youth boards statewide, advises the Michigan Department of Human Services on all policies and practices that affect young people in foster care, and alumni of the foster care system. The Michigan Department of Human Services is in the process of developing youth boards in counties all across Michigan so that the concerns of all of Michigan's foster children can be heard.

In January 2006, Michigan Department of Human Services Director Marianne Udow and Michigan Supreme Court Justice Maura Corrigan convened a statewide permanency task force to assess current services, enhance the coordination of services, and identify potential public and private resources and services.

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The final task force recommendations will be presented to the state Senate and House of Representatives by September 30, 2006.

Participation in the NGA Policy Academy is a powerful resource that will strengthen and enhance the process started by the task force. The academy provides a unique opportunity for state policymakers to work with national experts to design and implement new policies and programs for youth transitioning out of foster care.

"Ultimately, the goal is to improve outcomes for foster youths," Udow said. "These outcomes include increased rates of educational completion, employment, and civic engagement; reductions in teen pregnancy, homelessness, suicide, substance abuse and involvement with the juvenile justice systems; and improved health and well-being."

The NGA Policy Academy will begin in April 2006 and continue through March 2007. States participating in the academy will be represented by a core team, appointed by the governor and comprised of senior state leaders who are in a position to develop and implement substantial changes in policies and practices. Working closely with NGA staff and other experts, state teams will develop an action plan for improving outcomes for older youths in foster care, and those transitioning out of care.

For more information about foster care, visit the DHS Web site at www.michigan.gov/dhs. For more information about the NGA's Policy Academy, visit the NGA's Web site at www.nga.org.

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